DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 601 SO 018 069

AUTHOR Siegel, Patricia Jo
TITLE Lyndon Baines Johnson and Education.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Attitudes; Educational Finance; *Educational Legislation; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Political Issues; *Politics of Education
IDENTIFIERS Higher Education Act 1965

ABSTRACT

The Higher Education Act of 1965 fulfilled a dream for President Lyndon Baines Johnson. To understand this president's deep interest in education, one must first understand the factors which were responsible for the development of Lyndon Johnson, the man. His family background had much to do with his veneration of education. Both his parents and his grandfather had been educators and his father and grandfather had held public office. Thus, the tradition of public service was instilled in him at an early age. Later, as President, Johnson created a task force to reorganize the United States Office of Education. During his presidency, President Johnson secured the passage of some 60 education and education-related pieces of legislation. The amount of money invested in education almost tripled. Finally, Johnson's numerous educational accomplishments were curtailed by rising energy costs, inflation, and retrenchment during the subsequent, conservative administrations of Presidents Nixon, Ford, and especially Reagan. (BZ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED279601

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON AND EDUCATION

by

Patricia Jo Siegel

SO018069

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patricia Jo Siegel

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Patricia Jo Siegel
206 Campus Heights
Flagstaff, AZ 86001

Lyndon Baines Johnson and Education

For President Lyndon Baines Johnson the Higher Education Act of 1965, fulfilled a dream.[1] (Bornet, p 226) Lyndon Johnson had always believed "the classroom insured the preservation of democracy."[2] (Rulon, Phillip, p. 21) President Johnson wanted history to record his administration as one which attempted to improve American education.

In order to comprehend his deep interest in education, one must first understand the factors which were responsible for the evolution of Lyndon Johnson, the man. Lyndon's mother, his teachers, and later his wife were major influences. His mother desired to see him accomplish what she was unable to, encouraged him all his life, and made many sacrifices to see her dream come true. Her disappointment at his father's drunkenness and undependability caused her to place all her hopes and dreams on Lyndon's future.

Much of Lyndon Johnson's interest in education stemmed from his family background. His parents and grandfather had been educators and his father and grandfather had held public office. Thus the tradition of public service was instilled in him at an early age. His mother had dreams of greatness for her first born son. She taught him to read at the age of two, and enrolled him in a one room school near his home when he was only four years old.[3] (Kearne,p.225) Records show that he was an excellent student, made high grades, and graduated tops in his class. Unfortunately, the family moved when he was in high school. Because he attended a school which

did not include the twelfth grade and which was not accredited by the Board of Education, he had difficulty being admitted to college. He overcame this barrier, however, by his entry into a preparatory program at Southwestern State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas. Upon passage of necessary tests he entered the normal school to begin work on his teaching certification.

While a student at Southwestern State Teachers College, he was active on the debating team, where he came under the influence of H. M. Greene, professor of government and coach of the debating team. Professor Greene urged Lyndon to seek a political career and pointed him toward the United States Senate.[4] (Rulon, p.34) Lyndon also formed a friendship with the University's President, Cecil Evans. Lyndon earned his tuition by serving in an administrative position in the President's office. Here he gained valuable experience and developed many skills, such as writing letters, supervising employees, and understanding the relationship between politics and education. He never forgot the value of this experience, and his administration sponsored many internship programs for future civil servants.[5] (Kearnes, p. 48)

In 1928, financial problems forced him to accept a teaching position at Cotulla, Texas although he had only earned a two year teaching certificate. At the same time he enrolled in two extension courses per quarter so that he would not lose time from his education.

When he reported for work, the superintendent persuaded him to serve as principal at a salary of $125 a month. The school where he worked was in the Mexican side of the border town. It was here that he first became aware of the plight of impoverished minority students.[6] (Rulon p.40) He determined to improve their situation as best he could. He personally bought athletic equipment for the students and involved them in athletic

and debate competitions with neighboring schools. To improve their health, he organized a lunchroom where they received hot, nourishing meals. Years later his administration enacted several legislative bills in an attempt to alleviate the same kind of poverty he had witnessed as a young teacher. He believed that education was one of the primary factors in curing the problems of poverty.[7] (Rulon p. 42)

A year later, Lyndon returned to San Marcos, finished his studies, and graduated. Following graduation, he taught in Pearsall but soon moved to Houston, where he taught speech at Sam Houston High School. On November 30, 1930, Lyndon accepted a position as private secretary to Congressman Richard Kleberg, the son of one of the owners of the King ranch.

Lyndon's arrival in Washington with Congressmen Kleberg was the beginning of Lyndon Johnson's career in government and politics a career which would span four decades and eventually lead him to the Oval Office for five years. Lyndon quickly developed several friendships in Washington which served him well through his career. He paid daily visits to Congressman Wright Pattman and Sam Rayburn, both of whom were friends of his father, Sam Johnson.[8] (Kearnes p.70-71)

A turning point in his career came when he heard Franklin D. Roosevelt's inaugural speech, for he became a devoted supporter of the "New Deal." At this same time Lyndon became attracted to Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Taylor. After a two month courtship, he persuaded her to marry him. They were married on November 17, 1934, at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in San Antonio, Texas. After a brief honeymoon in Mexico, they returned to a small apartment in Washington where they set up housekeeping.[9] (Rulon, p 49-50)

There were a number of similarities between Rebekkah Johnson, Lyndon's mother, and "Lady Bird," his new bride. Both had suffered from loneliness and family tragedy and both sought refuge in books. Both of them sacrificed unselfishly to help Lyndon achieve his goals. The fact that both women possessed such qualities could have been the cause of much jealousy, but they were too clever to allow such a thing. They developed a relationship filled with love and respect for each other, and throughout their lives they shared a common goal for Lyndon.

Soon after marriage, Lyndon recognized a great deal of tension between himself and Congressman Kleberg and decided to move on to other pursuits. Lyndon accepted a position as the first director of Roosevelt's newly formed Texas National Youth Administration (NYA) in Austin, Texas, and again became involved in education. The NYA was a relief agency that gave part time jobs to students. Approximately one hundred thousand students took advantage of the agency. Johnson, an indefatigable worker, set about to make the Lone Star State a model for the nation. [10] (Bornet p. 54)

Lyndon Johnson used his position in the NYA as a stepping stone to further his political career. He combined the talents of many of his political cronies from San Marcos and Washington to create an organization which he used in his political career. During his involvement in the NYA, Congressman Buchanan of Brenham, Texas died, creating a vacancy which Johnson decided he could fill. He borrowed $10,000 from his father-in-law, gathered his organization, and proceeded to campaign for the Congressional post. After an exhausting campaign and close vote, Lyndon won the seat. Johnson ran his campaign as "the people's Congressman," modeled after his grandfather. He also ran as a "friend of President Roosevelt," who came to Texas on vacation after the election, and met the young Congressman.

President Roosevelt was very much impressed with Lyndon, and he arranged much support for him in Washington.[11] (Kearnes p. 86-88)

While in Congress, Lyndon served on several boards and gained the ear of many influential people. About six months after he took office, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and forced the U. S. to enter World War II. The day after the bombing, Lyndon Johnson joined the Navy, the first Congressman to enlist in the armed services. He spent a year in Australia and received a silver star for his work. A year later, President Roosevelt issued special orders which returned Senators and Congressmen to Washington.[12] (Kearnes p. 95)

As the war drew to a close, Lyndon Johnson became aware of the problems which faced the returning veterans, widows, and children of men who had died in the war. He drafted legislation which would provide federal funds for the education of veterans and dependents of men who had given their lives in battle.[13] (Rulon p 92)

After eleven years in the Congress, Lyndon Johnson ran for Senate and won. He shared his freshman Senate year with such famous men as Hubert Humphrey, Estes Kefauver, Russell Long and Robert Kerr. Each of these men would later become nationally known politicians. Three years later Lyndon became party whip, and two years after that, leader of the Democratic Party in the Senate.[14] (Kearnes p 102)

In his years as a Senator, Lyndon tried several times to get education legislation passed, but federal aid was a very controversial subject in America. People felt that federal aid to education would mean government control of education. There was rather a complacent attitude toward education until October 4, 1957, when the Soviet Union announced a

successful launch of a satellite, Sputnik, which orbited the earth about every hour and a half.[15] (Rulon p. 134)

Sputnik revealed the need for federal educational aid for defense. Faced with this information, the Senate commissioned Johnson's Subcommittee on Preparedness to investigate the educational implications of Sputnik. As a result of the committee's findings, they proposed H. R. Bill 13247, known as the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). The Act recommended training for young men and women in science and mathematics by providing fellowships for students working in areas critical to American security.[16] (Rulon p 138)

Senator Johnson expended a great deal of time and energy in the pursuit of supporters for these bills. On August 13, Lister Hill, chairman of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, praised Johnson's educational leadership. "There is no man in America who has done more to try to strengthen education, to strengthen the national defense and to insure the survival of our nation than has the distinguished senator from Texas." [17] (Rulon p 140)

Between the years 1958-1960, Congress proposed important educational legislation in response to testimony by several critics of the educational system. Among these were James Conant, former president of Harvard, Arthur Bestor of the University of Washington, and Admiral Hyman Rickover, who revealed the deplorable quality and quantity of science offered in the schools. These resulted in the passage of the NDEA, and a bill which provided low cost loans to students.

In 1959 Johnson decided to seek the Democratic presidential nomination, however he found that young Senator John F. Kennedy from Massachutts had a majority of support for the nomination. In 1960, John F. Kennedy offered

Johnson the Vice Presidency. After consultation with Sam Rayburn and other friends, Johnson accepted.

The Kennedy-Johnson team proved unbeatable, as Johnson's popularity brought the South into Kennedy's corner. After Kennedy took office, he appointed Johnson as chairman of several committees, but excluded Johnson from meetings with Kennedy insiders and advisors. President Kennedy appointed Lyndon to serve as chairman of his Presidential committees on Equal Employment and The National Aeronautics and Space Council. The subject of education proved to be a strong bond between the two men. (Kearnes p. 167)

Johnson exhibited complete loyalty and self discipline even when he disagreed with President Kennedy. He found himself stifled by the Vice Presidency, an onlooker to policies which he longed to have a part in. His only satisfaction came from the foreign trips he made as President Kennedy's representative. These tours appeared to energize him. In the poorest slums of India, on crowded streets of Dakar, in the markets of Thailand, he passed among the people distributing LBJ inscribed pens, shaking hands, patting heads, inviting a camel driver to America.[19] (Kearnes p.168) His personal diplomacy and impulsive behavior appalled many Foreign Service officials. However this was Lyndon's campaign style, and he was clearly an ambassador of good will for the United States. Returning to the United States, he was again the onlooker, but reports of his tours were filled with detailed suggestions regarding the necessity for America to provide aid to the poverty stricken countries he had visited and the need for international education to help the people help themselves. He believed such aid and education could prevent Soviet control of these Third World countries.

Vice President Johnson was uncomfortable with some members of

Kennedy's "Irish Mafia," as there was quite a difference in their backgrounds. Johnson had known poverty and had seen the effects of the "Great Depression", whereas, Kennedy and his friends were from wealthier backgrounds and better educated.

1963 was a low point in Lyndon Johnson's life. His popularity had decreased, his power in the Senate diminished, he spent more time at the ranch handling his business, and there were rumors that Kennedy planned to drop him from the 1964 ticket. These problems disappeared with a series of gunshots in Dallas, Texas on the afternoon of November 22, 1963, which abruptly ended the life of President John F. Kennedy and thrust Lyndon Johnson into an unexpected position of power. Johnson's management of those dark days which followed, and his promise to continue the goals of the "New Frontier," earned him respect and admiration from some, and resentment from others. He realized that the affairs of the United States Government must continue, regardless of the circumstance, and that he was the one who must create order out of the chaos.

During the next year he pushed through some of Kennedy's legislation much of which dealt with education. Finally, he realized that his obligation to President Kennedy was fulfilled and he could at last begin to plan for his own Presidential campaign.

He won the Presidential election as his own person, not as the successor of a dearly loved President under whose shadow he had lived for so long.

From the time of Kennedy's death to the signing of the Economic Opportunity Act, six education bills were passed. The first was the Higher Education Facilities Act, which provided for construction of classrooms,

laboratories, libraries and student loans for college students. Two days later the Vocational Education Act passed.

Soon after his election as President, Johnson created a task force to reorganize the US Office of Education. Between 1965 and 1966, a flood tide of legislation was enacted. President Johnson saw education as the primary weapon in the War on Poverty and the principal tool for building a "Great Society." [20] (Rulon p. 226) He proposed a budget that would more than double the programs of the Office of Education, including federal funding of elementary and secondary education.

Some of the legislation enacted in the Johnson Administration were the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which provided a better education for disadvantaged youth by improving teaching technology and hardware. Title I was a three year program supporting educational needs of children from low income families; Title II provided $100 million dollars for libraries, resources and instructional materials; Title III ensured the development of community supplementary educational centers; Title IV regulated educational laboratories; and Title V was a five year program which strengthened leadership resources of state education agencies.

Another bill established an Institute for the Deaf administered by Gallaudet College; Public Law 815 provided for construction of school facilities in Puerto Rico, Wake Island, Guam and Virgin Islands, places not accommodated by regular local schools.

His War On Poverty agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity, attempted to aid American Indians by providing education, better health care, and employment assistance. The creation of Project Headstart gave deprived preschool children a better foundation for education.

In 1966, the Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act provided a permanent program of educational assistance, home and farm loans, hospitalization and medical care, job counseling and placement for those young men and women who had served in the armed forces after January 31, 1955.

The Vietnam War and its escalating costs took away funds needed for education. It was an unpopular war which took the lives of many young men and women and raised some difficult questions about our role in the war. It was also responsible for President Johnson's decision not to seek the Democratic Presidential nomination.

During his presidency, President Johnson secured the passage of some sixty education and education related pieces of legislation. These bills provided federal assistance which ranged from preschool to the graduate level. The amount of money invested in education almost tripled. If not for the escalation of the Vietnam War, I believe that he could have enacted much more legislation, and therefore achieved his goal of a poverty free nation and an education for all children regardless of station in life. However the war drained the money for such legislation and in the process became the "death knell" for the "Great Society."

Johnson's numerous educational accomplishments were curtailed by rising energy costs, inflation, and by retrenchment during the subsequent, conservative administrations of Presidents Nixon, Ford, and especially Reagan. Federal control of education has declined while state influence has risen. Yet Johnson's vision of a Great Society undergirded by education remains for a later administration to bring to fruition.

Bibliography

Bornet, Vaughn Davis, The Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1983.

Caro, Robert A. The Years of Lyndon Johnson, The Path to Power, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1982.

Kearnes, Doris, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers. 1976.

Kluckhohn, Frank L. Lyndon's Legacy, Derby: Monarch Books, Inc. 1964.

Rulon, Philip Reed, The Compassionate Samaritan, The Life of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981.

Sherrill, Robert, The Accidental President, New York: Grossman Publishers, 1967.

Sidey, Hugh, A Very Personal Presidency, New York: Atheneum, 1968.

Valenti, Jack, A Very Human President, New York: W W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1975.